

## Take an idea and s-t-r-e-t-c-h it

### **Doris, the Death-Defying Dormouse**

*by Poppy*

Doris, my dormouse, may not have one hundred arms,  
But  
She does have wings of steel that reflect laser  
and anti-gravity light-as-a-feather paws.  
She does have teeth as sharp as our Head Teacher's stare  
and a super-smeller nose that can smell a bug in America.  
She does have eyes with sonar power  
and a tail that can change the way of the wind.  
She does have a memory that never forgets  
and can cook the best type of cookie.  
She does have the strength to swim round the world  
and could carry me twice around China.  
She does have a cage that will keep her at bay  
and now she's asleep in her pile of sawdust.

*What happens when you take an idea and stretch it?*

- *Similes and super creatures*

Begin with similes. Check that children know what a simile is and then ask them to write down as many similes as they can think of. After a few minutes go through the lists. Many children will have written down examples of common similes that they will have come across in books and at home – as black as ink, as cold as ice, as good as gold, as slow as a snail, as white as a sheet, as quiet as a mouse. Now point out how inaccurate some of these similes are in today's world. How many sheets are white these days? Has anyone lived in a house where there are mice – they certainly aren't quiet, especially at night if they live in the loft!

Discuss with the children how it is the writer's task to reject similes that are tired or overused and to look for fresh ways of making comparisons. Now ask them to take a well-used simile and to stretch it till it says something new; for example, 'as slow as a snail' could become 'as slow as a snail pushing a brick'. Make something even taller by stretching it from 'as tall as a giraffe' to 'as tall as a giraffe on stilts'. Then invite other comparisons. You could encourage the group by suggesting:

- *As weird as a dandelion clock saying tick tock.*
- *As slow as a farmer pushing his tractor up a steep hill.*
- *As sleepy as Sleeping Beauty waiting for a handsome Prince.*
- *As unhappy as a shoe being worn by a smelly foot.*

Children can then be encouraged to use such ideas in a poem which builds on one stretched simile after another.

This exercise involves taking an ordinary creature and turning it into a super creature. Ask the children to decide on a creature – a pet, zoo animal, farm animal, fish, bird, insect. Once this has been decided, ask them to find an adjective to describe their creature. Some alliteration could be effective here – my crazy crocodile, magnificent maggot, fantastic frog...

Start with a class poem on the board, which will then act as a guide for those who wish to follow it. Always make clear, however, that should anyone wish to adapt the model and take it off in another direction, then this is to be encouraged.

Now get the children to think of a first line, perhaps to do with the creature's size:

- *My terrifying tortoise is as heavy as a hippo holding weights.*

Now ask them about its strength and speed:

- *It is as strong as Hercules lifting the Eiffel Tower.*
- *And as fast as Shaun Wright-Phillips with rocket boosters.*

How noisy is it?

- *It is as noisy as a volcano erupting into a microphone....*

Ask the children to carry on adding to their poems by thinking about what and how much the creature eats and drinks, what its special characteristics are – very sharp claws, colourful wings, a long furry tail, etc. Is it fierce or friendly? Does it need protection – and if so from what – or does it protect you?

In the following examples, imaginations have certainly been stretched.

### **My Cousin's Gerbil**

*by Max*

When my cousin talks about his gerbil, he says that:

Its tail is like a huge viper that creeps through the sand and dirt.  
It is as black as the night,  
as black as the wet tyres of the HGV from Hell.  
Its soft and deep fur is often covered with dirt,  
as it burrows long, deep tunnels to faraway worlds.  
He says it often goes mountain climbing and pot-holing.  
It does abseiling and scuba diving,  
It does llama trekking and bare-back riding.  
Its cage is the size of the NEC in Birmingham but it often escapes  
to find new adventures in America or Asia.  
It likes to eat curry and pizza (vegetables only),  
not the usual diet for a rodent.  
After eating, it runs for miles, getting faster and faster,  
like a super-pigeon with rocket blasters.  
My cousin goes on for hours about this beast,  
telling of its great and marvellous feats.

And I don't believe a word of it.

But you should see my rabbit...

### **The Stupid Dumb Slug**

by Samantha

This stupid slug thinks he can beat Carol Vorderman in a maths quiz.  
He reckons he could win one million on Who Wants to be a Millionaire.  
He says he could rule Broadway while playing ping pong,  
Then boasts that he can beat a car in speedway  
and kill everyone in fighting.  
He thinks that he's as big as a T. Rex in a museum  
and as elegant as a dancer.  
He says he knows the meaning to every word in the English  
Dictionary.  
His job, he thinks, should be a lawyer, but he'd rather be an MP.  
He wants to be the new Superman  
and lift the heaviest weights.  
His favourite shop is Gap while he still likes Gucci.  
He said he passed his driving test first time when he was seven.  
(Well, it was at Legoland.)  
He says he's going to be the new Pavarotti while dancing the can-can.  
He says he has the body for the catwalk.  
He's definitely dreaming,  
That stupid dumb slug.

If you'd like to follow up this exercise, take a look at the poems of Ted Hughes in his book *Moon-Whales* (Faber & Faber). In this collection your able writers will be particularly interested in *The Snail of the Moon* (which has a wail...as though something had punctured him), *Moon-Heads* (...shining like lamps and light as balloons), and *Moon-Witches* (...looking exactly like cockroaches). These poems by this former Poet Laureate could provide your group with more models and further inspiration for imagination-stretching pieces about space creatures. Encourage them to write about the Jaguar of Jupiter, the Slithering Snakes of Saturn, the Vole of Venus and so on. This time in their poems, as well as describing the creatures in colourful language, suggest that the children think about how these creatures interact with others. Do the Monkeys of Mercury visit the Pythons of Pluto or fight with the Newts of Neptune?